

United States of America
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

MR. MEDEFIND: ...Well, I hope that over the course of the morning, both in the plenary time and in the workshops, the vision for the faith-based and community initiative came into clearer focus, even if you've been someone that has been involved with it from the very beginning. This vision of changing the way that government addresses human need, and leading a shift from government's natural inclination for the large and the distant and the bureaucratic program, and consistently moving in the direction of solutions that are rooted in the community, that are focused on the personal touch of neighbors serving neighbors, something that government alone never can bring. And so we have seen that all across -- that vision at work all across the Federal Government from prisoner reentry and addiction to homelessness.

But one thing that some people aren't aware of is that this vision is at work internationally as well. As Elizabeth mentioned earlier, it doesn't stop at the edge of the ocean -- this vision for transforming the way that we engage development and aid overseas as well. And so this lunch, as you will notice, is focused on this latter part of the vision -- engaging human need over the oceans from -- everything from malaria to economic development to hunger to HIV/AIDS. And to begin this, we are going to be welcoming to the stage an individual who straddles this world.

This U.S. Department of Agriculture is engaged in fighting hunger both here in the United States as well as across the world. And so who better than the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to tell us about this work. So it's my pleasure to introduce to you The Honorable Ed Schafer, who is the 29th Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And when we talk about innovative leaders who bring together experience from a variety of sectors, Secretary Schafer certainly is that. He has been a corporate leader, as well as an entrepreneur in the private sector. He has been engaged in a range of non-profit efforts. He was also a very successful two-term Governor in North Carolina. And he is bringing all of these strengths and background and knowledge to bear on hunger issues, both here in the United States and over the seas. Please welcome Secretary Ed Schafer (Applause.)

SECRETARY SCHAFFER: Thank you, everyone. Thank you for the warm welcome here today. It is a great day in America, and I am really honored to be with you here. I am proud to be a part of this program and congratulate you all for being with us. You know, I see that you are having lunch. I can hear the silverware clanking and the glasses being raised. Please continue to do so. Get up and get seconds, visit with your

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neighbor, do whatever. You know, as a former Governor, I'm used to speaking to the legislature.

(Laughter.) But thank you all.

I see that we have Ambassador Mark Dybul with us here today. He is the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator. Thanks, Mark, for being with us. And, you know, it is kind of fun to be up here at the podium today. I see the President is speaking shortly. Kind of feels like I am at the concert. You know, you have to have the warm-up act? (Laughter.) I have to tell you that in my first times in the office, when I would appear on the same stage with the President, I just was to stand there. I didn't say anything. I didn't have a speaking role. So I guess that I have passed that probation period now. (Laughter.) And I am glad to be here, with some comments today, for this important issue.

I really am pleased to join you for our faith-based and community initiatives, and how they have helped the United States Department of Agriculture provide food to Americans in need. This national conference on research, evaluation, and outcomes is clearly a partner, and we want to recognize your efforts there at USDA. You know, last week I had the honor to tour Iowa with President Bush. The floods have devastated many people there, and it reminded me of a situation we faced in my state after the Red River flood of 1997. And Jedd, by the way, it is North Dakota, not North Carolina. (Laughter.) A little different geography. Hey, that is 50 percent right, it's great. But -- (Laughter.) But it reminded me when we were at the flood waters about the devastation that we saw in North Dakota in 1997. You know, that was the largest forced evacuation and the 1,000-year flood event, the biggest flood event in the history of the United States of America before Katrina. I was Governor at the time, and I remember the frustrations of being there and knowing that there is only so much you can do.

You know, the state provided some money to help with recovery efforts, the Federal Government weighed in with dollars and resources, and the money certainly is important -- very important. It pays for the new sheet rock and the new carpeting at needed homes. It pays for people to stay in a location when they have been flooded out and their homes have been destroyed. But so much of the really critical work is done by faith-based and community organizations. They are the ones that send the people, the hands, that come in and lug out those water-logged carpets, that muck out the mud that is left after the waters recede, and who lovingly clean off the photos and the keepsakes of the family, and help bring that family back together. They provide the human touch that helps people get back on their feet. And that's why we, in government, need you as partners.

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Working together, we can address people's needs in their entirety, so that we are not only looking at one aspect of a problem, but all. At USDA, our faith-based and community initiatives have clearly helped us address the many challenges that we face today. Fighting hunger in America is one of our core missions. Roughly two-thirds, or \$62 billion, out of our \$95 billion budget is set aside for nutrition assistance programs. We believe that no one in this country should go hungry. And since 2001, our funding for nutrition assistance in the United States has nearly doubled. We have 15 nutrition assistance programs that provide children and low-income Americans access to food, to a healthy diet, and to nutrition education.

All told, our programs reach one in every five Americans. Our Women, Infants, and Children's program should benefit well over eight million participants this year. Our school lunch program provides means for more than 32 million of our youngsters. And our Food Stamp program reaches 27 million people each month. Another part of our Food Stamp program, importantly, these days is our disaster assistance Food Stamp programs, where we can go into disaster areas and provide opportunities to buy food, even if you haven't previously qualified for the Food Stamp program.

Our partnerships with faith-based and community organizations are critical to the success of nutrition programs. For instance, many Americans who are eligible for Food Stamp assistance don't take advantage of this program, often because they aren't aware of the food stamps or where you get them or how you do it. In the last three years, USDA has awarded nearly \$4 million to 43 faith-based and community organizations to help reach out to these people. Outreach efforts with partnerships, with you, your organizations, helped us boost participation in the Food Stamp program by 11 percent between 2000 and 2005. And that is a success that must be celebrated. But still, as always, there is much work to be done, both here at home and abroad.

Along with our domestic nutrition programs, USDA has a wide array of programs to provide food aid to people in need overseas. The United States is the world's largest provider of food aid. We consistently provide more than half of the food aid distributed in the world today, helping feed about 68 million people. The generosity of our country is astounding, and I am proud to represent our country when we see the impact of half of the food aid given across the world today. Our Food for Progress program donates commodities to people in developing countries that support democracy. And our Food for Education program helps support education and nutrition for nearly 1.5 million of the world's poorest children. Both programs are distributed with the help of faith-based and non-profit organizations. With the

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world's population growing by around 50 million people every year, this assistance is only going to grow more critical for all of us.

What I find most inspiring is how much people really want to help each other. In fact, I find that pretty often the biggest barrier that is keeping Americans from helping their neighbors in need isn't a lack of desire -- that's there -- but it's a lack of know-how. And that's why I am pleased to announce today that USDA is launching a new program called Fight for Hunger initiative, in order to help all Americans join USDA in the battle against hunger. (Applause.) Thank you. Right before I left North Dakota to come to Washington, D.C. -- quite a change, mind you -- but right before I left there was a group of high school students who visited a food bank. And for some reason, they were profoundly impacted by that visit. They saw people getting food that needed it. They saw the effort that it took to collect the food, to get it, to assemble it and distribute it, and they decided they wanted to get involved and they went back and they talked to their classmates. They traveled around and knocked on doors in the business community. They went to their church congregations and encouraged them to participate, and put a program together called Fill the Dome. We have a big covered dome, sports dome, in Fargo, and they started a program called Fill the Dome, with food. And they did a terrific job. And when I came out here, I thought, you know, we need to learn how to do that from those students, how to get involved in the community and leverage the assets that we put in to feed hungry people. So we've created this program based on the work that those students did, and our Fight Hunger initiative is now being launched today.

We have created an online tool kit that contains the step-by-step guides to start projects in your community, ranging from food drives to planting community gardens. We are also encouraging people to share their ideas on how to make a difference. You can nominate someone in your community doing the good work for the Fighting Hunger Initiative Award. It used to be called the Secretary's Award when we started it, but I think the lawyers got involved and there may be a different Secretary soon. So it's now the Fight Hunger Initiative Award. (Laughter.) But we really hope that this tool serves as an inspiration and a guide for communities, for people to get involved in the nutrition and nutrition needs of the people in their neighborhoods and in their communities across the nation. It was created in the same spirit as the faith-based and the community initiatives.

You know, I am a mechanic by nature. I grew up building automobile engines. And I like building things and getting moving parts together to create this kind of functional hole. And I look at the food problem and the hunger problem that way. I look at it kind of as a mechanical problem. There are jobs that

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need big tools, that need big things. The government is good at doing that, at providing the resources and the dollars that have an impact on the larger picture. But that's not only the work that needs to be done. To really fine tune things, you need those smaller tools as well, that precision tool that gets right to the heart of the work. You need to get local and personal. And that is where faith-based and community organizations can help so much. You provide that delicate work, the fine tuning, the detailed knowledge.

All together, we can make things run out there. And I am proud to work with the faith-based and community organizations, and I hope that we can continue to expand and improve our partnerships in the future. Thank you very much for your time today. I wish you Godspeed in all your work. (Applause.)